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ABSTRACT

A sample of 73 Vietnamese refugees living in San Diego North County, California, was surveyed about their educational and vocational background, both before and after arrival in the United States. The average age of the respondents was 34 years. The respondents had received an average of 11.5 years of education in Vietnam and 20.5 months in the United States. They had studied English as a second language for an average of 15.4 months, and two-thirds had received some form of financial aid to attend school. The results indicate that Vietnamese refugees have been unable to resume their former livelihoods and have had to enter the U.S. work force at the bottom of the ladder despite the magnitude of educational and financial aid services they have received. (RW)

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A SURVEY OF VIETNAMESE REFUGEE LOCATION IN THE U. S. WORK FORCE*

James Harlow

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*Lê, Thúy Tiên is to be credited with the translation of the survey questions and those responses in Vietnamese. Hà Nữ assisted in follow-up.

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This study represents an effort to measure the ability of Vietnamese refugees to position themselves in the United States work force. The results are based on a questionnaire survey of Vietnamese refugees. The findings may assist educators in their task of providing language and vocational skills to the Vietnamese refugee.

This study describes the past educational and professional experience of a representative group of Vietnamese refugees, their educational experiences since arriving in the United States and their work or professional situations at the present time. The assumption (based on 7 years of teaching ESL to Vietnamese refugees) when beginning the study was that although Vietnamese refugees have received unparalleled educational and financial aid since their immigration to this country began in 1975, only a small percentage of the workers have been able to reassume their former livelihoods.

1. Population Surveyed

Approximately 175 questionnaires were mailed to Vietnamese residents in the San Diego north county area. Familiarity with Vietnamese surnames enabled the writer to identify some 40 ethnic Vietnamese surnames in the 1982 San Diego North County telephone book in San Diego, California. There were 43 Nguyens listed; other major family names found were Ngo, Tran and Pham.

It was felt that these names represented a Vietnamese refugee population that had stabilized and settled, inasmuch as their names have appeared in the telephone book. This stabilization, therefore, gave us a population that had been in the United States long enough to have attended American schools and obtain employment.

It was further supposed that the names represented male, heads of household which ultimately was the target population.

An attempt to use addresses from college registrations from 1975 was an immediate failure since most of the refugees were transient at that time.

Another 15 questionnaires were received from Palomar College students who, since they were not heads of

households, had not received them at home and, for the most part, their questionnaires showed them as students in Vietname and, of course, students in the U. S. A.

2. Characteristics of the Respondents

There was a total of 73 respondents.

The average age of the respondent was 34.8 years. The respondents received an average of 11.5 years of education in Vietnam. Since coming to the United States, the average number of months of education received was 20.5. This included an average of 4.8 months of vocational education and 9.5 months of other academic studies. In addition, the respondents studied an average of 15.4 months of English as a second language. Exactly two-thirds of them indicated that they had received financial aid of some kind in order to attend school.

3. Results

The following table reflects the livelihood of the respondents, the number of months of study in the United States, the number of months of ESL study and the livelihood of the respondent today.

Table 1

Respondent	Livelihood in Vietnam	Months of Education in U. S.	Months of ESL Study	Livelihood in the U. S. A.
1	businessman	0	0	retired
2	electrical engineer	12	3	electrical engineer
3	military	18	7	electronic technician
4	policeman	6	6	unemployed
5	student	12	12	student
6	military	48	nk	electronic technician
7	electrician	12	12	not known
8	medical technician	3	3	social case worker
9	factory worker	0	0	unemployed
10	military	60	60	machinist
11	housewife	5	0	unemployed
12	student	60	0	engineer
13	military	0	12	student
14	photographer	4	4	electronics assembler

Table 1, continued

15	military	24	3	electronic technician
16	chauffeur	22	22	student
17	military	18	18	unemployed
18	farmer	6	6	unemployed
19	military	12	12	unemployed
20	businessman	12	12	factory worker
21	military	24	3	electronic technician
22	military	3	3	machinist
23	student	3	2	factory worker
24	dispatcher	48	48	electronic assembler
25	military	19	19	computer technician
26	fisherman	12	10	electronic technician
27	military	36	5	electronic technician
28	customs clerk	24	15	machinist
29	interpreter	24	0	machinist
30	businessman	12	12	mechanic

Table 1, continued

31	student	12	6	student
32	student	18	18	student
33	payroll clerk	5	5	unemployed
34	military	12	6	mechanic
35	electronic technician	12	12	electronic technician
36	student	36	12	restaurant manager
37	military	36	36	shipping clerk
38	teacher	48	12	electronic technician
39	military	12	12	rivetter
40	military	48	12	computer technician
41	student	48	48	computer programmer
42	interpreter	24	84	assembler
43	forestry engineer	36	36	manufacturing inspector
44	unemployed	0	7	unemployed
45	student	24	24	unemployed

Table 1, continued

46	secretary	14	14	student
47	housewife	15	18	student
48	electrical technician	18	18	electronic technician
49	military	24	24	student
50	civil service	24	48	electronic assembler
51	teacher	6	6	student
52	student	12	36	paper cutter
53	beautician	4	4	unemployed
54	military	24	24	die maker
55	carpenter	4	4	janitor
56	teacher	12	12	electronic assembler
57	mechanic	18	18	machinist
58	teacher	12	12	unemployed
59	court clerk	24	24	electronic technician
60	military	24	24	electronic technician

Table 1, continued

61	student	36	12	electronic technician
62	teacher	24	24	electronic technician
63	teacher	48	9	electrical engineer
64	fisherman	18	18	student
65	businessman	24	12	electronic technician
66	student	18	18	student
67	electronic assembler	24	24	electronic technician
68	businessman	24	24	unemployed
69	student	24	6	unemployed
70	student	24	24	student
71	administrative assistant	24	6	bank teller
72	military	24	6	electronic assembler
73	machinist	6	6	factory worker

Some highlights of the random study of the 73 respondents show that 19 respondents were formerly members of the Vietnamese military; this was 26% of the random sample. The next largest group was the expected category of student, with 14 respondents; 6 of the refugees were teachers in Vietnam, and 6 were businessmen.

As for their jobs today, electronic technician was the leading category, with 15. Five other respondents identified themselves as electronic assemblers.

4. Conclusion

The data shown in Table 1 combined with the results of the questionnaire regarding financial aid recipents appears to show that most Vietnamese refugees have had to adjust their occupational skills to meet the job needs of this country.

It is also apparent that professional or white collar workers have had to make adjustments in their career objectives.

This would seem to agree with an earlier report regarding Vietnamese refugees (Human Behavior, 1979) which found disparate situations such as a former M. D. as a dishwasher, an Air Force Colonel delivering newspapers, etc.

Although the respondents' average months of total education in the United States was 20.5, the total average months of ESL education was 15.4, which reflects the entry level of English of many of the refugees that arrived during the initial exodus.

In a study (Kelly, 1977) many of the early refugees were found to be educated--professionals or skilled workers. For them, all that remained was to receive English as a second language instruction.

Financial assistance for the education of the Vietnamese refugees was made available by several Acts of Congress (Hearing on HR 7897, 94th Congress, Nov. 5. 1975). Both children and adults received this financial consideration.

One study (ERIC Document, ED 187801, April, 1980) showed that by 1980, 46,182 Vietnamese school children had received $30,000,000 in grant awards.

Additionally, a review (Mulroy, 1977) listed new materials specifically developed to meet the educational and vocational needs of the Vietnamese refugees.

Such materials included the following titles:

Vietnamese supplements to Physics

Meeting the English language needs of Indochinese students

Teaching English to the Vietnamese

English/Vietnamese phrasebook

It is apparent that specific educational and vocational programs were created for Vietnamese refugees. It is also obvious that funds were made available to assist the refugee during his studies. However, the conclusion drawn from the present study seems to indicate that the refugee as a worker is having to join the American work force as an American youth would. That is to say, he must start at the bottom of the ladder. Unlike American young people, he must forsake his former career and take up one with lower prestige and salary than his former one.

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Vietnamese survey Questionnaire
(câu hỏi lượng giá trình độ nghề nghiệp)

1. What is your age?
- Anh (cô) bao nhiêu tuổi?

2. How many years of education did you receive in Vietnam?
- Anh (cô) đã đi học được bao nhiêu năm ở Việtnam?

3. What was your profession or job in Vietnam?
- Nghề chuyên môn hoặc nghề nghiệp của anh (cô) là gì khi ở Việtnam?

4. How many years of education have you received in the United States?
- Tại nước Mỹ anh (cô) đã đi học được bao nhiêu năm?

5. How many years of Vocational classes did you study?
- Anh (cô) đã theo học các lớp dạy nghề được bao nhiêu năm?

6. How many years of Academic classes did you study?
- Anh (cô) đã theo học các lớp dạy về lý thuyết được bao nhiêu năm?

7. Did you receive financial Aid to study in the United States?
- Anh (cô) đã có nhận sự giúp đỡ về tiền bạc trong việc học vấn ở nước Mỹ?

8. How long did you study English in the United States.
- Anh (cô) đã học tiếng Anh được bao nhiêu lâu tại đất Mỹ?

9. What is your job or profession now in the United States?
- Hiện giờ tại nước Mỹ, nghề nghiệp hoặc nghề chuyên môn của anh (cô) là gì?

Please return this form to: (Xin vui lòng hoàn mẫu giấy này lại cho:

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Thank you
(Cám ơn)